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Spring 2018 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed by graduate student instructors to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Tuesday, May 22. No exceptions can be made.

~Please Print Clearly. Do **not** use staples. Use paper clips only.~

Spring 2018 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

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Instructor's name Junting Huang
Department WML Course # and title COMI 1126-102 Remix Culture

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How to Craft an Academic Title?
Title of Writing Exercises
Instructor's signature Junting Huang Date 5/21/18

How to Craft an Academic Title

abstract: In this exercise, students learn to analyze academic titles of a research essay. It consists of three separate steps. They are designed to help them 1) identify the “academic style,” 2) understand the basic elements (the hook, the crux, and the source), and 3) analyze common strategies.

keywords: title, academic style, research essay, rhetoric

EXPLANATION:

At this point in the semester, students have been working on a research essay on a topic of their own choice. Before this class, they submitted the first draft, but many of them were struggling with the titles. In previous writing assignments, they tended to write vague and generic essay titles, which usually combined the source and method (e.g. “An Analysis of Sun Ra’s Music” or “A Summary of F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise*”). As such, I designed this in-class exercise to help them with this specific writing issue.

The purpose of this assignment is threefold:

- 1) to identify the “academic style”
how does the title of a research project differ from other titles?
- 2) to understand the basic elements of an academic title
what is a hook? what is a source? what is a crux?
- 3) to analyze common strategies for academic titles
how to come up with a hook in a title?
how to specify an approach, an argument, or an area in a title?

To this end, the exercise consists of three separate steps.

Step 1: Style

Students are presented with a set of titles. They are asked to identify which are academic titles and which are not. By comparing academic and non-academic titles, students learn to attend to different styles and reflect on their intended audience. They are also asked to support their claims with specific reasons. Here are some sample responses:

non-academic titles:

- What I Talk About When I Talk About Running
“This might be a title of a personal essay, a memoir, or a fiction because it uses first-person pronoun. It is intended for a general audience.”
- Why Rihanna Going Seapunk Is Totally OK
“This is probably from a news article, perhaps tabloids because of the topic; the language also sounds very casual.”

academic titles:

- The Effects of Light and Temperature on the Growth of Population of the Bacterium, *Escherichia coli*
“This is an academic title of a research project in life sciences.”
- Good Bye Lenin!: Free Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism
“This is probably taken from an academic piece in social science or history.”

Step 2: Element

In this step, students further dissect academic titles. First, they are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the sample titles. They discuss qualities of a great academic title—intriguing, clear, informative, etc. Here are some sample responses:

- Good Bye Lenin!: Free Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism

“I think this is a great title because the phrase ‘Good Bye Lenin!’ is catchy; the use of exclamation mark is unusual in academic articles, and it gets my attention immediately. The subtitle also clarified the topic of this article.”

At this time, students begin to notice some general patterns of academic titles. They are then asked to reflect on a set of common elements that these sample titles all share. Here are some sample responses:

- The Muse in the Machine: Or, The Poetics of *Zork*
“‘The Muse in the Machine’ is an interesting figure, and then the subtitle specifies the topic (poetics) and the source material (*Zork*).”

To conclude, students learn that an academic title usually includes three elements:¹

- 1) **a hook** (phrases that are catchy, interesting, or provocative)
- 2) **a crux** (phrases that demonstrate specific perspective, argument, or approach)
- 3) **a source** (phrases that identify the source materials)

Step 3: Strategy

Lastly, students examine specific strategies used in the sample titles. They are asked to reflect on creative ways to come up with a hook in a title. It could be a quote, a question, a seemingly paradoxical or counterintuitive phrase, etc. Students are also asked to use keywords to specify an approach, an argument, or an area in a title. Here are some sample responses:

- The Muse in the Machine: Or, The Poetics of *Zork*
“‘The Muse in the Machine’ is catchy because it is counterintuitive: Muse is usually associated with artistic inspirations, but the machine is quite the opposite. It usually represents tedious and repetitive labor. That’s why the phrase is so interesting. I want to know more about how these two can come together.”

¹ I borrowed this idea from a writing guide on the website of University of Michigan’s Sweetland Center for Writing. In “How do I Write a Great Title?,” three elements of an academic title are defined as follows:

1. **The hook** – This is a creative element that draws in the reader. Typically this is a catchy, readable phrase that advertises the paper’s specific subject. The hook is sometimes a direct quotation from a text or a sudden introduction of a new and exciting element of your topic.
2. **Key terms** – These are crucial words or phrases that are indispensable to the topic at hand. In academic writing, scholars are often asked to identify a few select terms that will identify their paper in an index. Similarly, the use of key terms in a paper’s title will make the paper more searchable in a database. You want to load your title with important terminology as a way to orient the reader to the concepts under discussion in the paper to follow. The best titles are like very brief summaries of the paper itself.
3. **The source** – Sometimes called a “location,” this is the place in the title where the concepts under discussion are to be found. Depending on the discipline, your source might be a piece of writing, the name of a text, a geographical place, a person, an existing debate, an organism, and so on.

HANDOUT:**How to Craft an Academic Title****1. Style**

- What I Talk About When I Talk About Running
- Let's Pretend This Never Happened
- Why Rihanna Going Seapunk Is Totally OK
- A Short Guide to Writing about Film
- Good Bye Lenin!: Free Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism
- The Artful Thunder as Dramatic Technique in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
- The Effects of Light and Temperature on the Growth of Population of the Bacterium, *Escherichia coli*
- The Machine-Language of the Muscles: Reading, Sport and the Self in *Infinite Jest*

2. Element

- The Muse in the Machine: Or, The Poetics of *Zork*
- Good Bye Lenin!: Free Market Nostalgia for Socialist Consumerism
- The Artful Thunder as Dramatic Technique in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
- "The Machine-Language of the Muscles": Reading, Sport and the Self in *Infinite Jest*

3. Strategy

- *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*
- *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*
- *Funk: The Music, The People, and The Rhythm of the One*
- *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*
- *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture*
- *Techno: An Artistic and Political Laboratory of the Present*